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PITT RIVERS AND HIS COLLECTION, 1874-1883:  
THE CHRONICLE OF A GIFT HORSE

I. *Introduction*<sup>1</sup>

The management of a newly acquired collection can be an irksome responsibility, as any modern museum director or curator knows. Often the problems of maintenance, arrangements for display, the need for funds for new staff and countless other considerations outweigh any possible benefit which might seem to accrue to an institution as the result of a chance gift or bequest. This is particularly true when the donor is still alive, and intent on having some influence upon the arrangement or care of his or her former property, as is so often the case. Museum collections also seem to make demands in their own right. Objects cannot simply be set aside or 'put on ice' while decisions are made about them. There are often immediate conservation needs. Damaging insects must be eradicated; fungi must be identified and removed. There are also cataloguing requirements. Objects must be 'accessioned', tabulated, placed in 'retrievable storage systems'. Then there are public and institutional concerns. Boards of directors, often again under pressure from donors, require that collections be put on exhibit, that catalogues and monographs be published. Members of the public, as well as specialised researchers, demand 'access'. The result is often regret at ever having accepted the collection at all. Sometimes, in fact, steps are taken to ensure that the collection is *not* accepted, as a way of avoiding the attendant problems.

The dilemmas of modern museum managers are no different from those of their counterparts 100 years or so ago. We tend to assume that in a simpler, more optimistic Victorian era things somehow went more smoothly. There were of course, numerous collectors - and hence donors - as there are today. Many, moreover, held philanthropic motives very close to their hearts.

Nonetheless, the problems and doubts still existed. Among anthropological collectors, Henry Christy (1816-1865),<sup>2</sup> the quiet-spoken proponent of Aboriginal rights, gave the British Museum its first comprehensive collection of ethnographic and prehistoric pieces in 1865. But for many years the collection had to remain in Christy's apartments in Victoria Street, watched over by a privately paid custodian in the employ of A.W. Franks (1826-1897), head of the then multifarious Department of British, Medieval and Oriental Antiquities and Ethnography, and very much unwelcomed by Bloomsbury. George Peabody (1795-1869), the noted Anglo-American philanthropist, and proponent of model workers' housing, searched for many years for a recipient for his collection of American antiquities before it was accepted by Harvard in 1866. Then Peabody had to provide both a lecturer and a building to house the collection before Harvard would consider the offer. The same was true of numerous other collections, both of objects of scientific interest, as anthropological collections were generally considered, and of the more easily accommodated art collections of the period. In short, a donation was seen more as a liability than a benefit. If not a gift horse, a 'white elephant' or 'albatross' might equally apply.

The ambivalencies inherent in museum custodianship are no better illustrated than by the circumstances surrounding the donation of the well-known Pitt Rivers collection to Oxford University in 1883. Pitt Rivers'<sup>3</sup> collection was, at the time, one of the best known in England. It consisted of some 14,000 items collected over nearly a 30-year period beginning around 1851, or the time of the Great Exhibition from which in many ways it took its lead. Initially, it was a military collection reflecting Pitt Rivers' career as a professional soldier. One of the first 'series', as he called the collection's divisions, was of muskets and other firearms illustrating 'the successive steps by which the rifle has attained its present efficiency'.<sup>4</sup> Other series followed a similar pattern, beginning with bows and arrows, then shields and throwing-sticks, down through more elaborate weapons and related objects, such as flails and early bucklers.

Sometime during the late 1850s, Pitt Rivers began to add objects of a less martial character, including a number of items illustrating what he referred to as the evolution of an ornamental form. Many were acquired during his travels, mostly in Europe and the Mediterranean, while others were presented by travellers and adventurers as they returned to London, often presenting their findings at one of the several scientific associations with which Pitt Rivers was associated. Pitt Rivers himself was not a wealthy man, particularly during his earliest collecting years. Still, his family ties and social connections were decidedly aristocratic, which, in turn, made both his contacts with dealers and other collectors and his purchases easier. Luckily, too, ethnographic objects could be acquired at the time at very little cost.<sup>5</sup>

By the 1860s, Pitt Rivers had begun to identify his collection, then housed at his home in South Kensington, with collections formed by natural historians and compared his own work directly with that of Charles Darwin. Around the same time he began to add to the antiquarian side of his

collection, an important feature in several ways from the first, both through further purchases and as a result of his own excavations. During the early 1870s, the latter, in fact, began to take precedence as Pitt Rivers' career began to take a more decidedly archaeological direction.

In 1874, with the new appointment as head of the Brigade Depot in Guildford, he decided to pass the collection on to a public body, initially to avoid the expense and trouble of maintaining it in London, but also as a way of further promoting his ideas to the general public and to fellow anthropologists. His choice initially was the newly-established Bethnal Green Museum, both because of its convenience and because as a new institution it seemed to be more amenable to his dictates. He also had some contact with officials there through an earlier loan exhibition. The new move was to be on a loan basis as well, as a way of reinforcing his continued interest in the collection. Pitt Rivers would soon discover, however, that even a new and uncertain institution such as Bethnal Green could begin to make demands in its own right.

## II. *The Museum at Bethnal Green*

The Bethnal Green Branch Museum to which Pitt Rivers was to transfer his collection represented an attempt by the Commissioners of the South Kensington Museum to extend their influence to parts of London which had never received the full benefits of an educational institution such as that at South Kensington. The facility was literally a South Kensington cast-off, consisting of several prefabricated cast-iron structures, popularly known as the Brompton Boilers, left over from the International Exhibition of 1862 and made obsolete by the new building programme in South Kensington. Sensing the opportunity for their re-use Henry Cole (1808-1882), for many years Director of the South Kensington Museum, had pressed for their re-erection at Bethnal Green, an area of east London noted for its poverty. Other civic leaders, including Sir Antonio Brady (1811-1881) and the Reverend Septimus Howard had joined him on behalf of their re-use. In 1871, Major-General Scott was induced to provide a new bright-red brick-front, a feature completed in the summer of 1872. The first exhibition was of Sir Richard Wallace's collection of paintings, pottery and porcelain figurines, displayed with the aim of conveying the history of art as well as of providing models for the area's craftsmen (many of them descended from Huguenot weavers). The second show, held the following year, was a display of various animal and vegetable products, tracing their origin, evolution and in many cases their etymological derivation. In terms of their general theme, therefore, both displays closely approached Pitt Rivers' own collection and can be considered as tantamount to harbingers.

Pitt Rivers made his final arrangements with the South Kensington authorities during the winter of 1874. The collection was finally set up during

the late spring of the same year. Most of the work was apparently carried out by the curator at Bethnal Green, G.F.Duncombe, a figure with whom Pitt Rivers exchanged occasional letters. In its final arrangement, the collection exemplified many of the newest ideas in display and organisation. New display cabinets were employed, both standing cabinets and desk cabinets, and modern descriptive labels were included for each display. A.W.Franks, of the British Museum, and John Evans (1823-1908), a noted numismatist-anthropologist and close friend of Pitt Rivers - both of whom earlier had been induced to provide materials from their own collections (Franks of ceramics and Evans of flint implements) - were also consulted by Pitt Rivers prior to the transfer of his own collection.

Pitt Rivers' catalogue for the collection, completed only after his move to Guildford, provides a fairly detailed picture of the collection and its extent at the time. The first segment of the exhibition was devoted to skull types and other physical features including samples of skin and hair. Drawings, reminiscent of the pioneering ethnologist James Cowles Prichard's gallery of ethnological types, supplemented actual specimens. Among the more interesting pieces were casts of the Neanderthal skull, presumably obtained through Thomas Huxley (1825-1895), again an acquaintance of Pitt Rivers, along with a number of modern Australian and, interestingly, Irish skulls, brought together, as Pitt Rivers emphasised, for comparative purposes. To underline his scientific allegiances, a number of primate skeletons and portions of skeletons were also on display, along with those of 'primitive man'.

The second part of the collection was 'Weapons', beginning with his display of throwing-sticks and parrying-shields and proceeding to shields of more recent manufacture, including a number obtained from the sale of the collection of Samuel Rush Meyrick (1783-1848) or illustrated in Meyrick's *Ancient Armour*. Body armour came next, augmented with actual examples from Meyrick's collection, as well as examples of Japanese and Chinese armour and more recent examples of chain-mail. Included among the latter were examples manufactured by British founders for export to India and elsewhere in Southwest Asia. The next series was head-dresses, followed by his more complete series of boomerangs and clubs, again accompanied by illustrations. Displays of blowguns, darts, bows and arrows, crossbows, flails, canoe paddles and finally halberd spikes, swords, daggers and bayonets completed the section.

The remainder of the collection remained uncatalogued. Only a summary was provided in Pitt Rivers' published catalogue of that year, although the latter still provides a fairly good idea of the collection as it existed at the time. 'Part 3', also treating essentially ethnographical materials, was perhaps the most diverse. Included were examples of pottery, tools, clothing, glassware, leather ornaments and items associated with religious practices. Reminiscent again of the Great Exhibition and many subsequent industrial or commercial exhibitions, there were also practical demonstrations, such as looms to demonstrate weaving techniques and a step-by-step visual description of

methods of hafting stone implements in various parts of the world, among other displays. Overall, the latter was the most heterogeneous segment of the collection but also the most coherent or integrated.

Probably the most thorough as well as the best-documented of Pitt Rivers' early displays was that dealing with early modes of navigation. Never actually described in catalogue form, Pitt Rivers nonetheless discussed that portion of his collection in a paper of the same title presented before the Anthropological Institute later that year.<sup>6</sup> From his paper it is apparent that there were five major divisions: (1) dugout canoes, (2) simple rafts, (3) bark canoes, (4) vessels of skins or wickerwork, and (5) outrigger canoes. Outrigger canoes were, in turn, subdivided into categories based on various minor features, such as types of sails or rudders, keels and so on. Finally, there was a display of modern vessels, in broad terms not unlike those on display at the Admiralty Office or more recently established at South Kensington. The most important feature of the primitive navigation display, however, was the overall emphasis on the geographical distribution of canoe and ship types. In each case, distribution maps supplemented other displays, tracing, for example, the spread of the bark canoe over North America or the use of outriggers in the South Pacific. As with the series on the degeneration of art, Pitt Rivers' aim was clearly to provide a picture of the diffusion of cultures and material traits, emphasising the 'amount of intercourse that took place across the sea in prehistoric times'.<sup>7</sup> It is in fact, through such a well-developed and documented series of the kind recorded by his primitive navigation collection that Pitt Rivers' own research ambitions for his museum became most clear.

The best indication of Pitt Rivers' attitude toward the custody of his collection during its first years in Bethnal Green lay in his approach to acquisitions. New materials were periodically added to the collection by Pitt Rivers; Duncombe was expected merely to set them up. The additions are extremely well-documented, the museum staff having carefully recorded each item as it was transferred. Unfortunately, the earlier 'Day' or 'Van' Book at Bethnal Green has been lost, and the record therefore, begins only in the latter part of 1875. The South Kensington receipts, however, date to 1st January 1874, when the collection was initially deposited in Bethnal Green, and extend to the end of the summer of 1879. As a result, they provide a remarkably accurate record of the collection as it appeared during those years, and a good indication of its extent at the time it was presented to Oxford.

The first major transfer after the exhibition was opened during the summer of 1874 was a mixed number of West African and Japanese materials transferred on 24 July 1874. Other similar materials, sometimes linked thematically, other times organised according to their place of origin, arrived nearly every other month for the duration of the loan period. Whether all of the items were recent additions, or simply materials not previously transferred, is less clear, although at least in some cases - judging by the large number of thematic groupings - they must have been part of his earlier

collection. There appears, nonetheless, no evident order to the transfers; such items as birch-bark canoes were as apt to follow examples of African ornament as models of prehistoric sites. Many are recorded as 'Brought in by hand by General Lane Fox'; others were evidently delivered by those working for him, such as his secretary or a clerk named B.M. Wright.

### III. *Transfer of the Collection to South Kensington*

In late October 1878, the receipts for the Pitt Rivers collection no longer list Bethnal Green, suggesting that the transfer to the main museum building at South Kensington had already begun. The existing day-books would appear to confirm such an assumption as well. For Pitt Rivers it was obviously his first step toward a more permanent solution to the management of his collection, and it is clear that he had pressed for the change, despite the fact that Bethnal Green was obviously to lose what Pitt Rivers himself saw as a valuable adjunct to the community's educational life. South Kensington, however, offered a better opportunity. Expanded considerably during the late 1860s and early 1870s through the addition of a lecture theatre, refreshment room, and the famous Square Court, the South Kensington Museum was the ideal location for a collection of the type represented by that of Pitt Rivers. While Pitt Rivers himself resented the so-called 'aesthetic' flavour of the institution, he was equally willing to reconsider his own assessment, in view of his eventual ambitions. South Kensington was simply the most practical place to which his collection could be moved. His return to London, his having retired from his Guildford post, merely made the actual process far simpler.

The details of the transfer can be reconstructed with relative accuracy. Pitt Rivers' and his family's own move back to London, initially to Sussex Place and then to Earls Court, in the autumn of 1878 coincided roughly with the reinstallation of his collection, and it was probable that he was on hand to supervise at least the beginning of the transfer. The Museum assigned Richard Thompson, the Assistant Director and hence a member of its curatorial staff, to undertake the responsibility for arrangement. Pitt Rivers was evidently satisfied with the Commission's choice, and had left for France on a four-month expedition recording ancient monuments before the job was completed. The collection was placed in two of the larger rooms of the Museum's new west gallery, following, it appears, roughly the same scheme as that at Bethnal Green. The fact that a new addition of the catalogue, published in 1877, was still intended to serve as a guide helps to bear this out. On 21st December, Thompson finally wrote to Pitt Rivers: 'Your collection was opened for public inspection Thursday last - at South Kensington, and looks well in its new home'.<sup>8</sup> From that date, until over five years later, it was to remain a standard attraction at South Kensington.

In the meantime, Pitt Rivers continued to add to the collection whenever

possible. Toward the end of September, or even before leaving for his trip to France, he obtained the collection of Andamanese implements, belonging to E.H.Man. One of the largest of its type, Man's collection numbered over 400 objects, ranging from harpoons and arms to bamboo water-vessels, woven mats, pottery, fish hooks and clothing. The collection was described at length at a number of meetings of the Anthropological Institute, and, again, Pitt Rivers had stressed the important role material culture could play in reconstructing the histories of the remote peoples represented in Man's collection. As he explained at the time:

In so far as my examination of this valuable collection enables me to form an opinion, there is nothing in the implements of the Andamanese which would lead us to differ from the conclusions arrived at on the grounds of physical constitution and language.<sup>9</sup>

To emphasise his point, Man's collection was placed on display at South Kensington soon after its acquisition, and several copies of Man's monograph, *The Arts of the Andamanese and Nicobarese*, were set out for sale to visitors, along with Pitt Rivers' own catalogue. Pitt Rivers, apparently, was responsible for the arrangements.

During his stay in France during the winter of 1878-79, Pitt Rivers' collecting efforts continued unchecked. On 30 December 1879, for example, a parcel - 'not opened' - from M.Paul Recappe, a Paris dealer, was received by Thompson. Other materials, ranging from Bulgarian necklaces (familiar to Pitt Rivers since his own early travels there during the Crimean War) to peasant implements from Brittany, the latter obviously obtained during his tour, were also sent to South Kensington for later inclusion and display there.

Prehistoric materials also continued to play a major part in the collection. Again, a number of objects were collected in France and sent on immediately. Others were purchased in Denmark the following summer when he and George Rolleston, his close friend and associate, visited there. Finally, a number were obtained through his own excavations, both in France and Denmark. Indeed by the late 1870s such procedure had become standard practice and, with the exception of his earlier prehistoric materials excavated under the authority of the Anthropological Institute at Cissbury, some of which were presented to the British Museum, nearly all the prehistoric and later remains excavated by Pitt Rivers were transferred immediately to the collection. Always, excavated materials continued to be supplemented by purchases from antiquarian dealers, despite Pitt Rivers' claim to the contrary, and entries attributing collections to dealers such as Rollin and Feuarent, located at the time near the British Museum, or to Procher and Co., Oxford Street, continued to appear on the South Kensington list.

Actual authority for the collection, in the meantime, remained curiously undefined. Technically it was still Pitt Rivers' property and only temporarily on loan to South Kensington. On the other hand, the collection was, in an

important sense, already in the public domain, subject to interpretation and revision by the South Kensington staff and, therefore, effectively out of Pitt Rivers' hands. Nonetheless, Pitt Rivers continued to exert an influence upon the collection, if only through his periodic additions of new materials. He also continued to advise Thompson and others, suggesting new ideas for series or for changes in display. The situation obviously presented ample opportunity for resentment on both sides; later complaints by Pitt Rivers suggest that disagreements were not unknown - 'and in fact were fairly common.'

Pitt Rivers' occasional arguments with those in charge of his collection at South Kensington served to underline a far more fundamental concern: whether he was planning to make his collection a truly public foundation by relinquishing his ties with it, or whether he was to keep it for himself. It was a decision that Pitt Rivers had been avoiding for a number of years. Still, something had to be done soon, and it was clear that the South Kensington authorities would no longer tolerate his attempts to retain control over the details of arrangement or add to or subtract from his collection as he pleased. The outcome was, as the Council on Education informed Pitt Rivers in late 1879, that the Museum would have to be given complete control if the collection was to remain on display there. In the light of his changing interests and the fact that he obviously cared less about the day-to-day management of the collection than before, his final decision would appear to have been a simple one.

#### IV. *Negotiations with South Kensington*

In the early part of 1880, Pitt Rivers became suddenly and unexpectedly the heir to a great fortune belonging to his distant cousin Horace, the sixth Lord Rivers. This change of circumstances was to have an important impact upon his life. His home at Earls Court was suddenly exchanged for the Rivers mansion at Grosvenor Gardens near Buckingham Palace. He was also heir to some 30,000 acres of rich agricultural land straddling the Dorset-Wiltshire border which now required his attention. There were prehistoric and early medieval remains spread out over the estate which ranged from Roman camps to Iron Age hill-forts and villages. These also attracted his interest and indeed were to do so increasingly over the next 20 years, as his famous excavations at Cranborne Chase clearly illustrated. In short, his attitudes both toward his professional activities and his collection were to change significantly.

The impact upon his collection was perhaps the most immediate. For the first time Pitt Rivers had the means to purchase in an unrestricted way, and he soon added a number of pieces to the collection, mostly through dealers. He also now had a more ambitious view of its potential. Only a few weeks after receiving notice of his inheritance, he let Richard Thompson at South Kensington know that he would 'extend much more rapidly than hitherto

the Ethnographical collection now exhibited at South Kensington'. He was also anxious, as he explained, to provide for a more permanent kind of foundation. Further reflecting his change of status, he stated conditions with greater authority: 'I shall want nearly double the space at once, and if my intentions are fulfilled, more rooms will be required immediately'. He also offered to pay the costs of an officer or curator assigned to supervise the installation of new materials and explain the series to visitors, that is if the Council on Education (the body overseeing the educational work at the South Kensington Museum) acceded to his other demands. However oddly stated, it was the first formal indication that Pitt Rivers was actually contemplating a gift either to the Museum or to the Government, whichever was willing to accept responsibility.

As a result of his proposal, steps were taken almost at once. The first move rested with the Lords of the Committee of the Council on Education. The Council, in turn, appointed a special committee formally to consider the offer. Richard Thompson and Norman MacLeod of the Museum's Science and Art Department were no doubt asked for their own recommendations. Their first choice was the well-known prehistorian and parliamentarian John Lubbock (1834-1913), and shortly afterward Lubbock was appointed chairman. Other members of the committee included J.F.D. Donnelly, Huxley and Philip Cuncliff Owen; Pitt Rivers had worked with the latter on provisions for the collection when it was still at Bethnal Green. The last two members were Edward Poynter (1836-1919), the well-known art critic and instructor at South Kensington, and George Rolleston, Pitt Rivers' long-time friend. John Fergusson, the architect and critic, had been proposed by MacLeod, but for some reason was dropped in favour of Franks. The decision, however, appears to have been a strategic one and may have been influenced by Pitt Rivers' own wishes.

Nothing remains of any possible exchange on Pitt Rivers' part with Lubbock or Rolleston, but a letter to Franks, of 27 June 1880, gives an indication of the course of the proceedings. It was obviously not their first communication over the matter and, indeed there is much in the letter to suggest that Pitt Rivers had spoken at great length to Franks prior to his offer. Moreover, there is a hint that Franks was already disappointed that Pitt Rivers' choice had not fallen on the British Museum, and Franks apparently had already explained that he was prepared to oppose the establishment of a second collection at South Kensington, expressly on the grounds that it would be in competition with Bloomsbury. Pitt Rivers was evidently intent on proving him wrong. His decision, he explained, had been largely one of convenience. Furthermore, his own collection, with its emphasis on 'continuity', addressed a more general educational purpose:

So far from its being antagonistic to the B.M. [Pitt Rivers wrote in his letter] it will be a most useful adjunct. The very wealth of the nation's collections precludes the possibility of their being arranged in subordination to educational purposes. As a means of education to the public the B.M. is

useless. I will supply that want. If you could give me the space I require with a life interest in the management of it I should be very glad but you cannot, and South Kensington can.

His terms, he emphasised, were final ones, and as he implied, he could well afford to hold to them from his present position. He continued in his letter:

If I cannot get more space at South Kensington to enable me to develop my museum on the plan I had developed hitherto the course I shall take will be this. I shall build a museum in or close to London about the size of the room I have at present. Keep the bulk of the collection in trays and drawers and exhibit only a few things in cases but I shall not have space available to continue the series and I shall make the museum valuable in other ways. I shall become a collector of ethnographical gems and when I die, I shall have received no encouragement to leave anything to the nation. If the nation will not accept my offer now on account of a [illegible] rivalry between the two departments I shall take good care it never gets anything from me. Science is cosmopolitan and I had rather leave everything to the United States. Meanwhile I am waiting for the decision of the authorities... I hope you will change your mind and support my plans. It is clearly the best thing you can do under the circumstances.

Within a few days, the beginnings of a compromise had begun to take shape. The main responsibility for the details of the negotiations rested with Franks, who informed Pitt Rivers of the proposal privately. The main point of the proposed agreement was that the collection would remain at South Kensington but that it would be under Franks' department at the British Museum. With Franks now officially on the committee, the chances of acceptance of the scheme seemed favourable as well. Writing to Franks on 1st July 1880, Pitt Rivers explained:

I am very glad you are going to be on the committee. There are one or two other points I might as well mention. I see there is a suggestion that my museum, remaining at South Kensington, should be attached to the British Museum rather than the Science and Art department. Of course to me it is a matter of indifference what the department is called [as long as all of] the conditions remain the same. I should prefer the B.M. [in thinking that?] it should be associated with officers who have a thorough scientific knowledge of the subject whereas South Kensington is more aesthetic than scientific. I have experienced the inconvenience of this and have expressed it. On the other hand will



the British Museum adapt itself to the peculiar conditions and accept the museum subject to my having the control of it during my lifetime. I consider this a *sine qua non*. It would not be possible to carry out my views in any other way. My object is, more space with a view to increasing the collection, and as the accumulations will be made with a view to a special arrangement in so far as the arrangement of the objects is concerned [it] must be in my hands. Moreover, the advantage I have over all Government Institutions is that, having one head, I can do as I please... I should not think of giving up that advantage.

Pitt Rivers was, nonetheless, at least partially aware of the difficulties and admitted to them. He also realised that there were limits to what he could expect.

I should not propose in leaving my collection to the Nation at my death to make any special stipulations. If my system were accepted by men of science, it would be continued. If it were not, there would be no object in continuing it. Moreover, views become so much changed as knowledge accumulates that it would be mischievous to hamper the future with ideas of the present.

Soon afterward, in response to a formal request by Thompson - and apparently a short note from Lubbock - an official statement of the requirements of the gift was drafted, and on 21 July, the latter was presented to the committee. The conditions were as follows. First, no part of the collection was to be sold during Pitt Rivers' lifetime. However, during the same period, he would be free to add to it or take from it at will, providing the elements for new series or making suggestions for the rearrangement of other ones as he saw fit. The Government, for its part, was to provide gallery space, cabinets and screens and would accept full responsibility for the safety and maintenance of the collection as well as any incidental costs such as labels, guide-books and the like. In detail, the conditions became more complicated. Specimens were to become Government property, but only after six months, and even then Pitt Rivers was to have the power to remove objects from the collection, if he found them 'useless for the purposes of the collection'. At the same time, Pitt Rivers insisted that 'no object could be loaned from the collection without his permission', that repairs had to be undertaken at Government expense, and that both insurance and what he described as 'police supervision' must also be paid for by the Government. His proposed scientific professional had been reduced to a mere 'curator', whose duties, it would appear, were to be more custodial than curatorial. The latter, however, would be paid a salary, at least during Pitt Rivers' lifetime, and the British Museum or South Kensington were to be allowed to make the selection.

It is a measure of Pitt Rivers' confidence in the importance of his collection and his offer that the terms should have been such unfavourable ones, from the Government and Council on Education's standpoint. Understandably the Council found the demands unrealistic and were obviously wary from the first. The committee established to consider the offer, on the other hand, was enthusiastic and reported toward the end of the year that its members were 'unanimously of the opinion that the collection offered to the Government, under the conditions stated... is of great value and interest'. Their only reservation was that the total number of specimens accepted should be limited to those required for the 'efficient illustration of the principles upon which it has been formed', suggesting at the same time that the present space allotted to the collection, as a result, would probably be adequate for its future needs. Rolleston, out of loyalty for his long-time friend, even differed on that point, suggesting that the collection be allowed to extend indefinitely and along the lines suggested by Pitt Rivers. The impression is that neither Rolleston nor the committee members could have recommended otherwise, given their long-time association with the donor.

The Council, in the meantime, was slow in forming their official response, and their decision was not made public until June of the following year. Their findings were set out in a letter to Pitt Rivers dated 3rd June 1881 by F.R.Sandford, the Council's Secretary:

I am directed by the Lords of the Committee of Council on Education to acquaint you that their Lordships have had under consideration the report of the Committee appointed to advise them in reference to the liberal proposal you have made in regard to your Ethnological Collection now being exhibited in the Galleries belonging to the Commissioners of the Exhibition of 1851 on the western side of the Horticultural Gardens.

The report in question proves the value and interesting nature of the collection, and recommends that it should become the property of the nation.

Their Lordships while accepting the conclusions to which the Committee have arrived, are however compelled, for the following reasons, to decide that it is not possible for them to accept the collection for permanent exhibition in connection with the Department of Science and Art.

In the first place, the space which the collection at present occupies has to be relinquished by the Department, and there is no other space at their Lordships' disposal, or likely to be provided elsewhere, in which the collection could be placed.

It is however chiefly on other grounds than want of space that my Lords have felt it incumbent on them to decline custody of the collection. Ethnology is not now represented in the collections of the South Kensington Museum, and it

is undesirable to commence a collection with special reference to this branch of science while there is another national establishment, the British Museum, a large collection of a similar kind.

It has been represented to their Lordships that your collection is arranged in a different system than that adopted at the British Museum, and as showing the development of form and shape, it would constitute an appropriate part of a museum like that at South Kensington, which is intimately connected with education in General and Industrial Art. Admitting to some extent the force of this argument, it, nevertheless, appears to my Lords that your collection, if the Trustees of the British Museum should be willing and able to accept it, would not in any way interfere with that already contained in that Museum, but, on the contrary would increase the interest of Ethnological specimens which it now possesses.

My Lords feel strongly the inexpediency of national museums competing against each other, and wish that, so far as possible, a distinct line should be drawn between the collection at South Kensington and those at the British Museum. Each should be made as perfect as possible, but should occupy different grounds. My Lords must add a few words as to the question of expense. Although you have liberally proposed to keep up the collection mainly at your own charge during your lifetime, the whole cost of the maintenance would eventually devolve on the department which accepts your offer. This might lead to heavy expenditure for a curator, attendants, further purchases, cases, etc., and the collection would require an amount of space not only large in itself, but out of proportion to that which they can ever hope to be able to set aside for other branches of more immediate practical and educational use. The expenditure would be exceptionally large at the South Kensington Museum, where there is at present no one connected with Ethnological Science on the establishment; and after you had relinquished the management it would be necessary to secure the services of a gentleman with special qualifications for the care of this valuable collection.

My Lords thoroughly appreciate the liberality and public spirit which have prompted you to make the offer, whilst they regret that they are unable to take advantage of it on behalf of the Department of Science and Art.

Pitt Rivers was understandably taken aback by the Council's decision, but it was hardly surprising that the response of the Lords of the Committee

should have been as it was. First of all, as the reply had explained, there was the matter of the expense involved, a public expense for what was still essentially a private collection. Then, too, there was the problem of competition with the British Museum. Since, of course, Pitt Rivers himself had described his own collection as an 'Ethnological' one it was difficult for them at that time to redefine it as one involving merely 'education in General and Industrial Art'. Even Pitt Rivers had stressed that South Kensington's interests were more 'aesthetic' than 'scientific', as he had explained in his letter to Franks. His sudden attempt to restate his own aims had been unconvincing to everyone involved.

#### V. *The final Settlement with Oxford*

Throughout 1880 and 1881 the question of a place for Pitt Rivers' collection was to remain unanswered. Pitt Rivers continued to add to it throughout the time of the negotiations with South Kensington, presumably in part as a show of good will. Between March and May of 1881, or just before his collection was formally rejected, he presented nearly a thousand new items. After the Council's decision, however, the number of loans was cut back, and between June and September there were less than fifty separate objects placed on loan. His series on locks and keys was also removed during July, but was returned soon afterwards; presumably the pieces were needed for the monograph he was then preparing.

Most of the new materials presented at the time were purchased from London dealers or were obtained through long-time contacts, such as Thomas Hutchinson or J.G.Wood. Other pieces resulted directly from his excavations. Those from Caesar's Camp in Folkestone were given in April 1881, just after his return from a trip to Egypt. To materials unearthed at Cranborne Chase, however, he assumed a different attitude, and everything resulting from his excavation of the barrows at Rushmore and the camp at Winkelsbury remained at his country seat of Rushmore, where plans were already underway for a new, and more modest, museum of his own.

Nonetheless, his as yet unrealised plans for his new museum did not solve the problem of the collection at South Kensington. By the end of the year the authorities there were becoming impatient as well. And when Pitt Rivers submitted a few small items in the autumn of 1881, he was promptly informed that the museum would no longer accept any materials from him on loan, indicating at the same time that the new arrangements were going to have to be made soon.

For Pitt Rivers South Kensington's attitude posed something of a dilemma. While the possibility of a private museum had been considered, as he had indicated to Franks, he was obviously reluctant to commit himself to such a course. The expense alone, as he must have realised, precluded such a solution. Also, there were the new demands of his estate and his increasing ill

health to be taken into account. The possibility of setting the museum up at Rushmore was evidently considered, but, of course, such a move would have defeated Pitt Rivers' main purpose - to make his museum a centre for scholarly and public interest.

His hope, then, was that some more satisfactory possibility would somehow present itself. His most obvious choice was one of the universities, as many before him had realised. Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh had long accepted private collections such as Pitt Rivers'. Indeed, the first recognizable public museum, Oxford's Ashmolean, was the result of the bequest of an individual donor who two hundred years before had presented his assortment of 'natural and ancient curiosities' to the University with the understanding that the University would build 'a house' for them. Other similar gifts, sometimes linked to individual donors and sometimes presented anonymously, had further expanded the University's collection in later years, as had similar bequests to Cambridge and other universities including Edinburgh in particular. Both Oxford and Cambridge, moreover, had received major gifts of both archaeological and ethnographical materials. Oxford could claim Sir Richard Colt Hoare's well-known collection from Wiltshire among its archaeological treasures, and a number of Cook-related materials, presented by Johann Reinhold and George Forster around 1777, among its ethnographical collections. Cambridge had the Disney collection from Greece and an assortment of ethnographical objects gathered over the years.

In either case, then, Pitt Rivers' collection, despite its vast size, would have closely followed an accepted pattern. From his point of view, however, that was precisely the problem. It was true that he needed a place in which to house his collection, but at the same time it was important to him that the integrity and method of arrangement be maintained. Other collections, of course, had been allowed to remain intact. Colt Hoare's collection at Oxford, for example, was displayed separately in the Clarendon Building. But more often new collections were simply absorbed into the general collection and reassigned to their special departments. Moreover, with the exception of Elias Ashmole's original Oxford bequest, none could be said to form the foundation of a new and separate subject of discipline, as Pitt Rivers would have liked. New departments and research schools based on museum collections had been established over the years, but it was the universities that made the decision, not the donor himself.

Interestingly, Oxford was not Pitt Rivers' first choice. The Cambridge anthropologist Alfred Haddon (1855-1940), in a single reference many years later, revealed that Pitt Rivers had considered Cambridge, but had changed his mind for uncertain reasons.<sup>10</sup> Haddon knew Pitt Rivers during the 1890s, corresponding with him on occasion, and it is likely that Haddon's remark was not unfounded. But little more is known of Pitt Rivers' decision in this regard. He had good reasons, of course, for picking Cambridge. His friend Lubbock's connexions were there, as were those of Franks, who was also a graduate at Cambridge. Moreover, Cambridge had already demonstrated at

least the beginnings of a commitment to British prehistory, largely through the efforts of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society; the latter had donated its own collection in 1880, and had established a central gallery in the newly-founded University Museum in 1881. Nothing survives however, among the Pitt Rivers papers of any correspondence on the matter, and exchanges with Baron Anatole von Hugel (1852-1925), the Curator of Ethnology and Archaeology during this period, involved technical matters and contained no hint that Pitt Rivers had once considered adding his collection to those under von Hugel's care. Nonetheless, the fact that Cambridge had taken steps to form its own archaeological museum must have acted as something of an inducement to Pitt Rivers to make some arrangements for his own collection before it was too late to claim full credit for the advancement of the subject. Furthermore, the fact that Cambridge had already begun to take steps of its own must have made his choice of Oxford even easier.

Toward the end of March 1882, Franks received a letter from Henry Moseley (1844-1891), then Linacre Professor of Human and Comparative Anatomy at Oxford, stating that Pitt Rivers, on the suggestion of J.O. Westwood (1805-1893), had finally offered his collection to the University. Westwood, who had been Hope Professor of Zoology since 1891, was obviously someone for whom Pitt Rivers had a high regard. A long-time friend of Pitt Rivers' uncle, Albert Way (1805-1874), Westwood was also considered the pre-eminent authority on the derivation of ornamental design. Pitt Rivers must have hoped that Westwood's presence would have at least a residual influence on actual provisions for the collection once it was moved to Oxford - something which in fact never worked out according to plan. Moseley, Franks' correspondent, was also acquainted with Pitt Rivers, having been an active member of the Anthropological Institute since his return from a three-year voyage as Chief Naturalist on H.M.S. *Challenger* in 1877. Pitt Rivers had once praised a paper of Moseley's at the Institute for 'the evident accuracy of the observations which the author has made upon these... almost newly discovered tribes'. And to return the compliment, Moseley had presented a number of objects from his own collection, principally Andamanese and other implements from South Asia and the Pacific, to Pitt Rivers shortly afterward. That Moseley would in the end be connected with the collection, therefore, was another factor in favour of Oxford. Moseley's own written protestation to Westwood that the credit for attracting the collection was Westwood's suggests that he was aware of his own influence on Pitt Rivers' decision as well.

Probably the deciding point in Pitt Rivers' choice, however, was the fact of his friend George Rolleston's connexion with the University. A Fellow of Pembroke since 1851 and Linacre Professor of Anatomy and Physiology since 1860, Rolleston had been closely involved in the establishment of scientific studies at the University, and during the early 1850s, was one of the first lecturers at the new University Museum. He had been close to Pitt Rivers since the late 1860s and early 1870s, advising him on faunal remains and helping him on excavations on a number of occasions. His death in the



summer of 1881 was a blow to many; Pitt Rivers wrote his obituary for the Institute's Journal and contributed generously to the Rolleston Memorial Fund. His decision to leave his collection to Oxford, therefore, could be seen as a further gesture to Rolleston's memory. That Moseley had inherited Rolleston's chair (or technically speaking, a subdivision of it) only underlined the connexion more clearly.

Nonetheless, the matter of the collection's donation was far from settled, and it was up to Moseley to persuade the University authorities to accept Pitt Rivers' offer. One of Moseley's main reasons for approaching Franks at the time was on precisely that point; he needed backing in his campaign on Pitt Rivers' behalf. Shortly afterward, the well-known anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1913) and John Evans were also approached, and, together with Franks, each was asked to provide a short statement of support to be read before the Hebdomadal Council, the main University governing board, later that spring. As Moseley explained to Franks:

I think the collection would be a splendid gain to Oxford and would do much [illegible] in the way of letting light into the place and would draw well.

Furthermore, as he continued,

it would act as an introduction to all the other art collections... and would be of extreme value to students of anthropology in which subject we hope all men to take degrees very shortly.

Anticipating the opposition of some members of the Council, Moseley asked that both the collection and its arrangement be represented as favourably as possible.

Franks, Evans and Tylor complied shortly afterward, and in submissions published in the *University Gazette* on 30 March 1882 offered their own justifications for its acceptance. Franks was the least enthusiastic:

The collection is a very instructive and valuable one... [T]he system upon which it is arranged is different from that I have adopted in arranging the national collection of ethnology, but it seems to me very desirable that collections should be arranged on different principles from each other, as each system brings out special points of information and enables the student to see the various aspects of a subject.

Evans struck a similar note, again offering as much an apology as a commendation:

As a school for studying development in form and in art it is unrivalled, and the mere fact of its peculiar arrangement, with the view of illustrating development, does not at all distract from the value of the Collection from an ethnological or anthropological point of view.

Only Tylor, apparently already anticipating the possibility of a position, offered unrestricted praise:

Oxford would I think do a very important service to Anthropology and History by taking and housing the Collection, which would not only do its own work but would enhance the value of the Ashmolean [Museum] by making it intelligible.

Armed with his letters of recommendation, and under a directive from Pitt Rivers, Moseley made the offer to the University in late April 1882. Pitt Rivers' own conditions were similar to those offered the previous year to South Kensington. The University, for its part, would be required to accept the collection as it presently stood (including its arrangement), and Pitt Rivers would continue to have the final word over its control until his death. The University would also be required to provide a building and supply the necessary museum cabinets, cases and screens. The subject of a stipend for a lecturer or curator, however, had apparently been dropped, as had Pitt Rivers' earlier stipulation that he be allowed to borrow from the collection at will. Otherwise, the University was free to do as it chose. As a further inducement to the members of the University, copies of the *Catalogue* and off-prints of an article in *Nature* of 1880 describing the collection were placed in the Radcliffe Science Library at the University Museum. Again Moseley was responsible for the arrangements.

Moseley's efforts were successful, and on 30 May 1882 Evan Evans, the Vice-Chancellor of the University, delivered the Council's opinion, 'That the offer of Major-General Pitt Rivers, F.R.S., to present his Anthropological Collection to the University be accepted'. It was also suggested that arrangements should be made for its management and maintenance and further suggested that an annexe be appended to the east end of the existing museum. Echoing Moseley's earlier findings, it was proposed that such an accommodation could be carried out at a cost of between £7,000 and £8,000.

It will be seen [the report continues] that the Collection, besides having great intrinsic value, which from the scarcity of the objects themselves must necessarily increase as time goes on, it is of very wide interest, and cannot but prove most useful in an educational point of view to students of Anthropology, Archaeology, and indeed every branch of history.

All that remained was for a committee, comprised of Henry Acland (1815-1900), Regius Professor of Medicine, Prestwich, Moseley, Westwood, Henry J.S. Smith (1826-1883), Keeper of the University Museum, and Henry T. Pelham (1804-1886), one of the Curators of the Park, all 'selected from Convocation', to provide a more detailed set of recommendations to the Council and establish guidelines for acceptance. Cautious as ever, the

University had taken its first steps toward acceptance, which was completed on 20 May 1884 by the affixing of the seal to the Deed of Gift.

## VI. Conclusion

The Pitt Rivers Collection was successfully transferred over to Oxford over the four years between 1884 and 1888. Responsibility for it rested for a short time with Moseley, then afterward with his assistant, Henry Balfour (1863-1939); Edward Tylor, officially attached to the Pitt Rivers Museum as a lecturer, gave assistance and sometimes actually helped with arrangements. Pitt Rivers from that point on had little official involvement in the management of his collection. On several occasions, however, he did attempt to intervene. Still, his forays were effectively blocked, primarily by Balfour and the University. He was never particularly happy with this state of affairs and, indeed, regretted the end of his active connexion. As he wrote two years before his death to F.W.Rudler, then President of the Anthropological Institute:

Oxford was not the place for it [his collection], and I should have never have sent it there, if I had not been ill at the time and anxious to find a resting place for it at some time in the future.

But of course, nothing more was to be done. The collection was finally and effectively out of his hands.

## NOTES

1. The research on which this article is based was first presented in my D.Phil. thesis, *Ethnology in the Museum: A.H.L.F. Pitt Rivers (1827-1900) and the Institutional Foundations of British Anthropology*, University of Oxford 1981, which should be consulted by the reader for references to the material presented here. Background information on Pitt Rivers and his museum can be found in T.K.Penniman, *A Hundred Years of Anthropology*, (1935), London: William Morrow 1974; T.K.Penniman, 'General Pitt-Rivers', *Man*, Vol. XLVI, 1946; T.K.Penniman, 'A Note on the Beginning of Anthropology in Oxford', in *Anthropology at Oxford*, F.Oxford Univ.Anthr., 1953, pp.11-14; E.B.Tylor, 'Pitt Rivers', in *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1917; H.St.G.Gray, 'A Memoir of General Pitt-Rivers', *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological Society*, Volume XLVII, 1900, pp. 123-137; *idem*, *Index to 'Excavations in Cranborne Chase...'*, Taunton Castle: privately printed 1905; *idem*, 'Lieutenant-General Pitt-Rivers', in *Memoirs of Old Wiltshire*, London: Bemrose 1906, pp.47-65; *idem*, 'Recollections on the Occasion of the Five-Hundredth Meeting of the Oxford University Anthropological Society', in *Anthropology in Oxford*, 1953, pp.3-5; B.Blackwood, *The Classification of Artefacts in the Pitt-Rivers Museum Oxford*, Oxford: Pitt Rivers

Museum 1970; M.W.Thompson, *General Pitt Rivers*, Bradford-upon-Avon: Moonraker 1977; M.W.Thompson, *Catalogue of the Pitt Rivers Papers in the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum*, 1979. For a more complete bibliography see Chapman, *Ethnology in the Museum*.

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The following archives are the ones I relied upon for my research and I would like to thank their respective institutions for permission to refer, and in some cases to quote from, unpublished material: Bethnal Green Museum (archives); The British Library (Sotheby sales catalogues); The British Museum (archives); The Dorset County Record Office; The Pitt Rivers Museum (Balfour Papers); the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum (Pitt Rivers Papers); T.H.Aston, Keeper of the Archives, University of Oxford (Hebdomadal Council Papers); University Museum, Oxford (Westwood Papers); and the Committee for the Ashmolean Library (Rolleston Papers).

2. Biographical information, unless otherwise specified, is from the *Dictionary of National Biography*.
3. Until 1880 Pitt Rivers was known by the name of Lane Fox, more commonly Fox; the name-change was occasioned by the conditions of a will (that of the 2nd Lord Rivers). His forenames were Augustus Henry. This makes for some confusion when writing about him or in compiling a list of his works. For convenience and clarity I have referred to him as Pitt Rivers throughout the course of this paper and have listed his works in the same way as well.
4. A.H.L.F.Pitt Rivers, *The Instruction of Musketry*, Hythe: Hythe School of Musketry 1856, p.7.
5. One anthropologist writing in the 1870s remembered when, not long before, a South Seas club could be obtained for 'an empty beer or pickle bottle', (see 'Godefrey Museum in Hamburg', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Volume IX (1879), p.462). The cost in London shops was not much higher (see Chapman, *op.cit.*, pp.40-41).
6. A.H.L.F.Pitt Rivers, 'On Early Modes of Navigation', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, Volume IV (1874), pp.399-435.
7. *Ibid.*, p.435.
8. R.A.Thompson to Pitt Rivers, 21 December 1878, *Pitt Rivers Papers*, p.121, Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum.
9. A.H.L.F.Pitt Rivers, 'Observations on Mr.Man's Collection of Andamanese and Nicobarese Objects', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, Volume VII (1878), pp.434-451, at p.450; *Pitt Rivers Papers*, p.46a-49, Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum.
10. A.C.Haddon, 'Pitt-Rivers' (Obituary Notice), *Nature*, Volume XLII (1900), pp.59-60.